

'Made in America' hails the working-class hero

MADE IN AMERICA, A play by Alvin Boretz, directed by Steven Robman; set by D. Martin Bookwalter, costumes by Molly Harris Campbell, lighting by Paulie Jenkins, sound by Stephen R. Shaffer; produced by Mark Taper Forum, Music Center, Los Angeles. New Theatre For Now Festival second production, closed Sunday night.

Matt McAvoy	Brian Dennehy
Frances McAvoy	Elizabeth Huddle
Steve	Patrick Stack
Eugene	Earl Billings
Beckman	Carmen Arganziano
Ruthie	Valerie Curtin
Paul McAvoy	Mark Herrier
Vincent	Pat McNamara
Jack Potter	Michael Talbott
Ben Kittredge	Dan Monahan

By Richard Stayton

"Made in America" is a title freighted by playwright Alvin Boretz with multiple meanings: made as in seduced, exploited, compromised. His working-class America isn't "Flashdance" country; it's where promises of the good life earned by honest, hard labor — the immigrant's dream — vanishes before inflation and foreign competition. His hero, Matt McAvoy, knows this: "A promise was made to me and it was broken!"

Forty-eight-year-old steelworker McAvoy, the son of an Irish immigrant, has pressed molds for 20 years on an assembly line, yet always anticipated an escape: "I've been a dreamer all my life." Those dreams were inherited from his father, who "believed in the American experiment, a new world," but ended up staring at it in a whiskey glass. Like Hamlet, McAvoy is preoccupied with his dead father, here symbolized by a disembodied tenor's voice crooning Irish folksongs. Like Willy Loman from Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman," McAvoy is losing himself: "Somewhere I fell between the cracks and I'm disappearing."



Brian Dennehy as McAvoy: "I've been a dreamer all my life."

Elizabeth Huddle as McAvoy's patient wife discloses emotional sorrows in a lucid, controlled, poignant performance. Valerie Curtin expresses romantic interest in McAvoy without betraying a hint of lust — remaining sympathetic and believable in a difficult role.

But McAvoy is the key character, and Brian Dennehy doesn't have the skills for tragedy, only for arousing sympathy. Desperation should tremble his every line. Instead, his growing panic appears to emerge from what his wife calls "a change of life." This work offers familiar, complex, normal Americans struggling with our most common enemies while speaking beautifully rendered working class dialogue. That alone is so rare in this era of contrivance and hype that one prays this work gets resurrected in a new, improved version.